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ABSTRACT

Steps to alleviate the problems in achieving successful technical and cross-cultural training for United States Peace Corps volunteers are discussed. Historically, training was conducted at American universities or centers in Puerto Rico, Hawaii, or the Virgin Islands, but by the mid-1970s, in response to criticism that this provided inadequate preparation for the social conditions volunteers would find in their assigned communities, most of the training was being conducted in the host countries. Inadequacy of technical training meant volunteers were generalists, not specialists. However, it was felt that generalists could become experts given the proper training in self-reliance and self-determination with regard to individual service goals. Three current programs designed to provide such training are: (1) David Leonard's trainers' orientation manual (stressing clear definition of goals, resources, and process of training, and describing the training program as an experiential learning experience); (2) James McCaffery's manual (designed to familiarize the student with basic concepts of development); and (3) the Peace Corps' Information and Exchange Division workshops (concerned with agricultural marketing in developing countries, and experiential learning). However, none of these programs describes how to identify local leaders and prepare them to take responsibility for community projects, and a useful guide to this process is Helen Strow's training manual (1974). A greater degree of consistency needs to be ensured amongst trainers, and efforts should be made to match volunteers and assignments. Preservice training programs should be concerned with accumulation of experience rather than specific technical skill. (JMM)

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SELECTED TOPICS IN

PEACE CORPS TRAINING

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INTRODUCTION

Every volunteer in the United States Peace Corps faces a great challenge in attempting to be a successul agent of change in his or her community. It is one of the major tasks of Peace Corps Administration to try to assist each volunteer in preparing for this challenge. Through its twenty-five year existence, Peace Corps has made a great effort to do so in developing its training program. Unfortunately, evidence such as that found in a world wide survey of volunteers has shown that Peace Corps has not always been successful. Fewer than 40% of the volunteers interviewed expressed satisfaction with either the technical or the cross-cultural training that they received (ACTION, 1976).

This paper will discuss some steps to alleviate this problem. Initially the historical development of Peace Corps training will be examined, leading to programs currently in use. Relevent concepts then will be explored. These will include those presently favored by Peace Corps Administration, such as participatory adult education and experiential learning, and those not currently emphasised: leadership development and a long-term training program with universities.

It is hoped that the more viable concepts dealt with in the paper will be adopted or reinforced by Peace Corps. Any improvement in training then will increase future volunteers' awareness of the problems of community development and of the possible solutions.

Two major limitations of this paper should be noted. The first is that the paper's emphasis will be placed on preservice training concepts in relation to developmental and technical matters. Admittedly Peace Corps training is an on-going process that continues throughout the volunteer's service. It is also concerned with other important matters, most notably language and cross-cultural awareness. Furthermore, it has been the intention of Peace Corps to integrate all components of training into one holistic program. Therefore, any discussion of the developmental and technical components of training cannot occur without some mention of the cultural and language components. Secondly the difficulty of forcing a radical change upon an established government institution such as Peace Corps is acknowleged. Smaller changes that are compatable within the institutional framework are anticipated to be much more likely.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Since its inception, Peace Corps has attempted to provide adaquate training to its volunteers. The bulk of the first training sessions were conducted at either American Universities or training centers established at Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and the Virgin Islands. Hoops (1966) listed the following purposes of Peace Corps training:

Peace Corps Purpose and Philosophy
Language
Host Country Overview
United States Overview
World Affairs
Communist Tactics and Theory

Health
Technical Matters
Self Development

This last issue was often dealt with at outdoor camps with activities similar to that of Outward Bound. Training at the Peace Corps camps included community exploration methods and field training in nearby villages.

As expected these initial attempts met with substantial criticism. The most common complaint was that training was either insufficient or inappropriate in preparing the volunteers for the social conditions of the host countries, conditions that were substancially different from those in the United States. Lowther and Lucas (1978) was particularly vocal in this respect. He stated that crosscultural training was extremely inadaquate, and that virtually no emphasis was placed on developing both personal and professional relationships with host country co-workers. This insufficient or inappropriate preparation resulted in volunteers developing improper and often antagonistic relationships with the local people as well as an attrition rate that in some countries was as high as 30%.

Peace Corps responded to these criticisms and placed more importance on preparing volunteers for host country conditions. Initially they used more trainers from host countries and simulation sessions that were intended to familiarize trainees with life overseas. By the mid seventies, most of the training was being done in the host countries. To further familiarize volunteers with the local culture during training, living arrangements with host country families were provided.

However, problems have persisted. GAO (1981) concluded that "volunteers do not receive the type, quality, and and degree of cross-cultural, language and technical training they need to be effective". Lowther and Lucas further explored the inadaquacy of technical training when he stated that, for practical reasons (such as limitations in recruitment and material support), the bulk of volunteers that will be availabe to Peace Corps will not be specialists but generalists. This was reinforced by ACTION's (1975) survey of training, service completion, and cost-effectiveness of over 1,600 volunteers in 11 countries. They concluded that generalist's effectiveness was comparable to that of specialists in the field of agriculture and that their monthly support cost was lower (Lowther and Lucas inferred that this was due to Peace Corps's inability to properly realize the potential of specialists). Unfortunately, Peace Corps classified many of these generalists as experts since these were the type of volunteers most requested by host countries. Naturally a great deal of resentment resulted when the generalist volunteer's host country counterparts realized the actual abilities of these supposed experts.

Both Lowther and Lucas and ACTION acknowleged that generalists could legitimately be utilized as experts, provided that they were

trained in specific, well defined roles and then be given proper support and supervision. The fact that providing such support for volunteers assigned to remote areas is often beyond the logistical capabilities of Peace Corps Administration demonstrates the need to promote volunteers' self reliance (Lowther and Lucas, ACTION). Therefore, the critical issue for any training program would be to first prepare the volunteers in such self reliance. In the context of technical and developmental training, this means the trainees should be shown how to determine the field in which they can make a worthwhile contribution. The next section will describe three Peace Corps training programs designed to do this.

THREE CURRENT TRAINING PROGRAMS

The first program to be discussed is Leonard's trainer's orientation manual (1982; the first of a four volume series of agricultural training guides). This manual was based on Peace Corps current emphasis on the Core Curriculm Project which stressed clear definition of the goals, resources, and process of training. It was developed from the experience of training 150 Peace Corps trainees in the PENN Center at Frogmore, S.C.. According to Leonard, the training program would be an exercise in experiential learning for the trainee. As implied by its name, experiential learning pertains to knowlege and skills acquired through life's experience. Leonard's program was designed to provide trainees with concrete experiences that they could later utilize as volunteers. It was hoped that this would be an appropriate training program in enabling trainees to promote self sufficiency and independence in the community where they were assigned. This ideal was reflected in the program itself where each trainee is responsible for determining the suject matter which he or she will learn. As the training progresses, more responsibility for the program is placed on the trainees, as opposed to the trainers, just as it is intended that the future volunteers progressively will transfer the management of a project to members of their host community.

In planning such a program, Leonard described the actions needed to prepare what he called the four elements of training: learners, methods, environment or context, and trainers. Leonard's steps in advance preparation are listed below.

1. Research - Identifying the goals and topic of the training. Area studies of the future volunteer's assignment and his or her potential role in such an area are also essential.

2. Defining Goals and Skill Groups (defined as the components of each chosen goal)

3. Financial and Administrative Planning - Necessary to insure that the program's activities fall within the regulatory and fiscal restraints set by Peace Corps Administration.

4. Site Selection and Preparation - Only important in Peace Corps areas without permenant training facilities.

5. Staff Selection and Training

6. Training Design and Scheduling

7. Specific Component Preparation

Staff selection and training deserve special mention. Based on the needs of the program (which often are determined by the number of trainees and subjects being taught) and the available funds, a typical training staff would include any of the following.

Project Director
Technical Coordinator and Trainors
Language Coordinator and Trainors
Administrative Personnel
Medical Assistant

Criteria for selection would be based on experience in a relevent subject, as well as in education, and on variety of background.

Training is necessary to insure that the staff work as an efficient team. The training program's goals and everyone's individual responsibilities in working toward those goals should be understood by all. They should be acquainted with the concept of experiential learning and be able to provide proper assistance to the trainees in such a program. The anticipated result of this training is the ability of the staff to cooperate in solving problems.

Training design and scheduling should also be further examined. Leonard stated that daily and weekly schedules should be made that reflect the long term goals of the program and then be posted to keep the trainees informed. He described a hierarchy of design elements in which several activities comprised a class or session which was in turn part of the daily schedule. A weekly schedule consisted of activities that shared a common theme. Leonard placed high emphasis on demonstrative activities, such as small gardens or construction projects, in the program. In order to provide information needed to determine the progress of each trainee he stated the need for trainee evaluation throughout the training program. He also said that trainees be asked to evaluate the program in order to provide necessary information for improvement. He emphasized that all scheduled events should not be treated as separate activities but rather as part of one integrated program.

McCaffery's manual provided a program that was designed to familiarize the trainee with the basic concepts of development (the manual was not yet fully field tested when it was published in 1981). Each session of the program had an overview that informed the trainee of the goals, process, and activities of that session. Such activities included role playing, readings, group discussions, and

multiprogram training group.

The first six sessions of the program were concerned with the basic concepts of development. They are as follows.

1. Introduction

2. Dynamics of Development

3. Information Gathering - This is a vital concept to be used when the trainee is a volunteer at his or her assignment. It is closely related to the term, situational analysis and, if taught correctly, will enable the volunteer to properly assess the conditions in his or her assigned community.

4. Working with Others - McCaffery described the necessity of establishing proper working relations with co-workers and examined the respective advantages of two types of relationships: dependancy of the community upon the volunteer and the eventual independence of the community. Like Leonard, McCaffery wrote that the evolutionary process from direct service toward the community's self sufficiency was desired.

5. The Role of the Development Worker

6. Problem Solving - This concept follows situational analysis. An objective is determined and any obstacles to that objective are identified. A procedure to achieve the desired outcome is devised based on personal attributes, available resources, and the social condition of the community.

Four integration sessions followed, aimed at bringing the development session together into one holistic process.

1. Job Entry - The volunteers are to use the skills learned in the Information Gathering and Working with Others Sessions in order to establish themselves in the community as agents of change. Important components of this process include initial scouting of the community, diagnosis and problem solving.

2. Project Planning - While the volunteers are establishing themselves in their communities, they have to set realistic, personal goals. The time frames of these goals are immediate, short term and medium (up to six month) goals and reliable indicators of progress should be included. In doing this, the volunteers should make use of skills in assessment and problem solving.

3. Project Management - It is important that volunteers learn

direct supervision. Techniques for short term and long term management, such as time lines and contingincy plans, should be taught. McCaffery noted that experienced volunteers could be a valuable teaching resource for this session.

4. Responsibiliy - Working relationships, including supervision, clarification of roles and delegation, were necessary concepts in the determination of responsibility in a development project.

It was McCaffery's contention that these ten sessions formed a training program that would be appropriate for any field of development.

Peace Corps's Information and Exchange Division (May 1984) presented a two week workshop concerned with the single program of agricultural marketing in developing countries. The material was based on experience gained from pilot workshops in the Philippines, Costa Rica, and Papua New Guinea. This program also utilized the concept of experiential learning in which the trainers were called facilitators in order to describe their role of assisting the trainees learn for themselves.

In order to establish the proper relationship between these facilitators and the trainees, ICE stated that the first activity of the program was to acquaint the trainees with the staff. Trainees should also fill out personal resourse forms since many participants might have relevent skills or experience that could be utilized by the facilitors. The program's objectives, methods, subjects to be covered, and everyone's roles and responsibilies should be clearly explained to the trainees to be reconciled with their own goals and aspirtations.

Issues to be discussed in the workshop include the following.

1. Needs assessment

2. Market Familiarization - Similar to situational analysis with emphasis on the interrelations of the market system. This would be accomplished by such experiential activities as preparing reports on local markets.

3. Relevent Concepts on marketing

4. Available Resources for development

5. The Volunteer's Role as an Agent of Change

6. Possible Alternatives for Improvement of the Present System - Potentials, procedures, and constraints are examined.

Simulations were heavily emphasized to familiarize the trainees

with the marketing system and to determine the proper reactions to modifications in the system. Other activities were concerned with information collection and experimentation and problem solving. In these sessions, trainers were to assist the trainees to determine entry points and establish proper working relationships to achieve the objective of being a successful agent of change.

RELEVENT CONCEPTS

Two of the issues constantly mentioned in the above programs are the establishment of working relationships and the progress toward the community's independence of the volunteer. However, none of the programs were very specific in describing the process of identifying local leaders and proeparing them to take responsibility for community projects. A useful guide to this process is Strow's (1974) training manual. The principles in the manual also could be useful for trainers in teaching trainees leadership principles. It described the growth of leadership ability by using the term, "leadership ladder". Initial duties are small and upon their successful conclusion, responsibilities can be increased. Every task should be prepared in advance to insure success. This advance training should include the relevent subject matter, teaching methods, group dynamics, and leadership qualities. This would be a good method for volunteers to use to be gradually accepted in their community.

If the volunteers themselves employ these methods with local people, they should remember to ensure that the local leader receive adaquate satisfaction from their job. Methods suggested included recognition and invitation to special activities. A good result of leadership training could be the development of an advisory council that could be similar to those in the American Extension Service in that they can assist the volunteer in training and in determining programs. A logical conclusion of this would be the leader taking over the reponsibilities fron the volunteer. A volunteer needs to development good interpersonal skills and cultural awareness to employ these skills.

An issue that Peace Corps would be well advised to further pursue is learner participation. Peace Corps has long advocated this concept. Ruopp and Wrobel (1967) stated that the maximum participation of the trainee should be maintained within the training structure. This would help determine the appropriate program and even utilize the trainee's own talents as resources (an idea later reinforced by ICE's marketing manual; Peace Corps, 1984). A similar concept in adult education, called self directed learning, was described by Knowles (1970). Knowles stated that people learn more effectively if they are given some of the responsibility to determine subject matter that is appropriate to their needs and interests. He stated that adults prefer education that is geared toward immediate application and that will increase their personal experience. Knowles described a program design used by courses in Boston University that employed this concept. The steps included assessment of learning needs, formation of course objectives, and preparation of learning

appropriate for the learners (ibid).

ICE also dealt with trainee participation, saying that it was flexible in regard to each trainee's personal attributes and that it fostered cooperation in experimenting with alternative market activities. There are at least two limitations with Peace Corps's use of participation in training. One is the hesitancy of trainees to experiment in an unfamiliar environment. It is therefore the responsibility of the facilitator to help the trainees overcome such hesitancy and to determine whether or not such experiments are socially appropriate in the host country. It is no catastrophe if the trainees make a mistake in suggesting alternatives in the social system. In fact, it could be a constructive learning experience if the facilitator and trainee objectively evaluate the activity afterward. This illustrates the fact that the facilitator does not simply relinquish responsibility for the trainees in a participative learning activity.

A related limitation is the availability of qualified facilitators. Trainers in any participative or self-directed learning program must be sensitive to the needs and problems of learners and be able to motivate and guide those learners over an extended period. Long term motivation is particulary important since trainees often have difficulty in initially appreciating some of the concepts in international development. It might be difficult for Peace Corps to find such facilitators from its usual source of trainers. Host country educators often have a traditional authoritarian view of teacher-learner relationships (Srinivasan, 1977) while American trainers are often former volunteers who have little formal experience in educational methods. It is therefore the responsibility of Peace Corps to alleviate this problem through recruitment and preparation of qualified trainers.

Another training issue that received attention in the late sixties was integration into academic programs. One of the strongest advocates of this was Roupp (1968) who suggested that universities treat volunteer service as a form of work study or internship and offer credit toward a development service degree. Training could be a long term process and initially consist of core courses at the universities that would include cultural studies and practical skills. The term of service would be then incorperated into a curriculum. Roupp listed several universities that initiated these programs, starting with SUNY Brockport which incorperated Peace Corps service in Latin America into its Baccalaureate and Masters curriculum for math and science teachers. Similar programs were started at Radcliffe College and the University of Wisconson at Green Bay.

Peace Corps has continued to work with universities in developing training programs, though on a contract basis. One example is a stateside training program designed to prepare teachers for Liberia in which the University of the District of Columbia assisted in daily planning, placement for field excersises, and the preparation of sessions dealing with lesson plans and curriculum development (Peace

favorable admissions treatment to returned volunteers.

However, the formal permanent link between Peace Corps and American universities envisioned by Ruopp has not persisisted. None of the colleges mentioned above Brockport, Radcliffe and UWGB still list an ongoing program incorporating Peace Corps service. There are several possible reasons for the decline of this idea. One is the Peace Corps's decline in popularity during the seventies. Another is the possible incompatability between university departments that have specific, long term goals and a centralized government agency that is characterized by constant staff changes. Lastly, Peace Corps's education program which was most popular as an international internship, has been deemphasized.

Alternitives to this arrangement have been suggested. Lowther and Lucas advocated a link with universities but he specified one between specific country adminstrations and local institutions. This would give stability to idividual in country programs but would not be the formal integration into the volunteer's educational process that was envisioned by Ruopp. Another possibility would be a cooperative arrangement between universities and smaller, private agencies that share the same objectives. An example of this would be the link between Stanford University, the University of California at Santa Cruz and Volunteers in Asia. In this arrangement, the volunteer's education is considered to be just as important as the service he or she provides.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Two related issues that have been discussed regarding Peace Corps training are participation and experiential learning. While the theory behind each generally has been accepted as appropriate stratagies toward adult education, their practical applications in Peace Corps often have been uneven in quality. The success of these programs depend upon the ability of the trainors to facilitate the process for the trainees. Such ability has varied among the individual program trainors as well as the permanent training offices in each Peace Corps country. Peace Corps should take steps to insure that a greater degree of consistancy exists in this regard.

Experiential learning and information gathering take on special significance since volunteers are often responsible for determining their own roles in their community. Peace Corps's site development often has been acknowleged to be insufficient in matching a volunteer to an assignment with appropriate duties. In any case it is basically the volunteers' responsibily to decide where their individual talents could be best utilized.

With this in mind, it is concluded that preservice training programs should be more concerned with the process of accumulation of experience rather than with any specific technical skill. As noted in the introduction, Peace Corps training takes place throughout a volunteer's term of service. In-service training programs and resource identification sessions can provide volunteers with the

specific skills that were advocated by Lowther and Lucas and ACTION. It is the responsibility of each volunteer to determine the proper skill to acquire. It is the responsibility of Peace Corps to insure that each volunteer can do this. If this can be accomplished through preservice training, much would be done toward accomplish the ideals upon which Peace Corps is based.

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